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Going MainStream

Unit serves residents with developmental and physical challenges

By MONICA YOUNG
Special to the News & Record

Participants in MainStream Resources Unit programs may ride the bus for more than an hour to get to an activity that does not last as long as the trip there. But that's OK. According to coordinator Martha Cook, bus rides provide valuable time for bonding.

"We have a family setting. We don't serve large numbers because of needing a certain staff-to-participant ratio, so we are very close-knit," Cook says.

MainStream Resources is the division of the Greensboro Parks & Recreation Department that offers recreational activities to people who have developmental and physical disabilities and visual impairments. The programs provide opportunities to eliminate logistical, emotional and social barriers.

About 500 residents typically take part in MainStream programs each month, Cook says, adding that the number quadruples during the summer. The unit offers 17 weekly programs and each month holds 10 special events like bingo games and day trips.

"Our opportunities range from active to sedentary. We have special events that follow the seasonal calendar. Some of our opportunities

involve life skills like going shopping or going out to eat," Cook says.

Regular outings include bowling for visually impaired members every Tuesday and Thursday at Gate City Lanes and a wheelchair exercise class on Fridays at Smith Senior Center.

The majority of the programs are free, Cook says, adding that MainStream offers free door-to-door transportation to city residents for most programs. As a city-run unit, "We are strictly a service to the citizens."

In addition to its own programming, MainStream Resources partners with other area agencies that share a similar mission. These joint efforts can include offering facilities and equipment and supporting other agency programming.

The unit was formed in 1957 and has held various names over the years, but MainStream Resources was chosen about eight years ago to emphasize the unit's inclusive programming, which has expanded to serve people who are new to dealing with physical and mental challenges because of illness, trauma or accidents. "The goal was to make the name more global and to be more people first," Cook says.

Family and friends also are encouraged to take part in activities.

"Our primary focus is

serving people with special needs and disabilities," Cook says, "but we also allow individuals (depending on space availability) without disabilities to participate." Friends and family members often want to join activities, and programs such as water exercise attract wider interest.

Camp Joy, the seven-week summer day camp for people with physical and mental developmental disabilities, also has 10 spots for "reverse inclusion," or people without disabilities.

MainStream Resources has been recognized locally and nationally for its strides in serving children and adults with various needs. Two full-time staffers and four part-time, seasonal staff members run the extensive programs, with help from volunteers. Additionally, 21 seasonal staff members work at Camp Joy.

"We're pretty proud of what we're able to offer with such a small staff and dedicated volunteers," Cook says.

Proof that the programs are effective and worthwhile can be found in the staff that includes former participants. And Cook has been with the unit for 27 years.

"Obviously this is really rewarding for me. I'm doing exactly what I would want to do if I didn't do it for work," she says. "My passion has always been this."



NANCY SIDELINGER/Special Sections Photographer

Ted McLamb of Greensboro bowls at Gate City Lanes during a weekly outing for the visually impaired with MainStream Resources, a unit of the Greensboro Parks & Recreation Department. Some participants are assisted by parks employees and handrails during the regular games.

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